SENA
STANDISH-ERICSSON NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Standish Ericsson Neighborhood Association
1830 East 42nd Street
Minneapolis MN 55407

Phone: 612-721-1601
Fax: 612-721-4687
E-mail:
office@standish-ericsson.org
Web-site
standish-ericsson.org

SENA Mission Statement:
The Standish-Ericsson Neighborhood Association brings neighbors together to build on the strengths of the Standish and Ericsson neighborhoods – stability, diversity and concern for others.

February 21, 2008

Council Member Gary Schiff
Minneapolis City Council
350 South Fifth Street
Minneapolis MN 55415

Council Member Sandra Colvin Roy
Minneapolis City Council
350 South Fifth Street
Minneapolis MN 55415

Dear Council Member Schiff and Council Member Colvin Roy:

On behalf of the residents of the Standish and Ericsson neighborhoods, the Standish Ericsson Neighborhood Association (SENA) opposes City support of the proposed Midtown Eco-Energy Biomass Facility (the facility), and further opposes the development of any large scale combustion-based plant which would impair the air quality and negatively impact public health in our community.

The SENA Board of Directors was first made aware of the air quality concerns during our December meeting. Dan Cooke, a resident of the Standish neighborhood, presented concerns regarding toxic emissions, as would be allowed by Midtown Eco Energy LLC's permit, and also regarding the viability of a 100% biomass facility in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area.

Several members of the board sought additional information on the air quality impacts of a biomass generator, including the comparative impact of the proposed facility to other forms of heat and power generation such as coal and natural gas. Individually, members of our board have communicated with our elected representatives other city and state officials. Based on responses received from several experts and elected officials, our conclusion is that, at best, a biomass facility would have air quality impacts no better than coal or natural gas. In fact, we believe a wood burning facility might emit toxic chemicals not present in coal or natural gas emissions.

We also understand that it is not certain that there is a sufficient amount of 100% biomass fuel available in the metro area to make this facility viable. We believe that because the project requires a substantial amount of publicly-backed funds, it is incumbent upon us to evaluate the financial risk of this project. While we believe there will not be a shortage of demand for electricity, we are not certain that this plant can operate on 100% renewable fuel. This uncertainty poses significant risks to our community as, once the facility is complete, it could well function on a variety of fuels. There is no way guarantee that this facility would burn 100% renewable fuel through its useful life. We must consider the possibility that non-renewable and otherwise non-desirable fuels might be used in the future to keep the facility in operation. Because publicly-backed funds will be used to finance this operation, there will be an inherent financial incentive to maximize energy production. This would place a public finance interest at odds with the interest of public health.

While SENA is generally supportive of renewable energy, and has sponsored many efforts to reduce the overall carbon footprint of the Standish and Ericsson neighborhoods (primarily through conservation), we are also concerned with public health and air quality, especially as our community continues to deal with pollution caused decades ago. We do not wish to see mistakes of the past repeated.

In recent years, we have seen positive developments in our neighborhood and the surrounding community – specifically the success of the Midtown Greenway and Light Rail Transit. As we strive to draw more families and individuals into our neighborhood, we hope to continue working with our elected officials to ensure that decisions today support these goals for our community. The board feels the proposed facility would be a step backward from the significant gains that have been made by our city and by our community.

We have appreciated the responsiveness of our elected officials in helping us understand this issue and look forward to continuing to work together and with other neighborhood associations to continue to make Minneapolis one of the healthiest places to live in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Joel Zylstra
Board President

JZ/sky
cc: Mayor R.T. Rybak
Sen. Patricia Torres Ray
Rep. Jim Davnie